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ABSTRACT

The role of politics in education is undeniable. It appears as though the influence of governing agents, from the White House to the local school board, is growing. During this time of increased calls for accountability and reform, a growing list of educational mandates is being handed to local education entities--increased use of testing, teacher-proof curricula, and legislation regarding who can and will teach children. For many education leaders at the local district level, the increased demands and prescriptive measures are perceived as hindrances to their work of educating children. Historically, a high value has been placed on localism. Involvement from various political levels is often met with resistance, as was evidenced during the early 20th century when leaders tried to remove schools from politics. If politics is a necessary aspect of education, local education leaders need to understand and embrace the system in a manner that supports their work of educating children. This booklet, with the essay "Is Politics in Education Here To Stay?" (Rhetta L. Detrich with Paul Kimmelman), and accompanying compact discs examine the history, structure, and presence of governance and the politics that arise from governing a system for the common good, plus thoughts on how local leaders can work within a political system. (Contains 20 references and 2 compact discs.) (RT)

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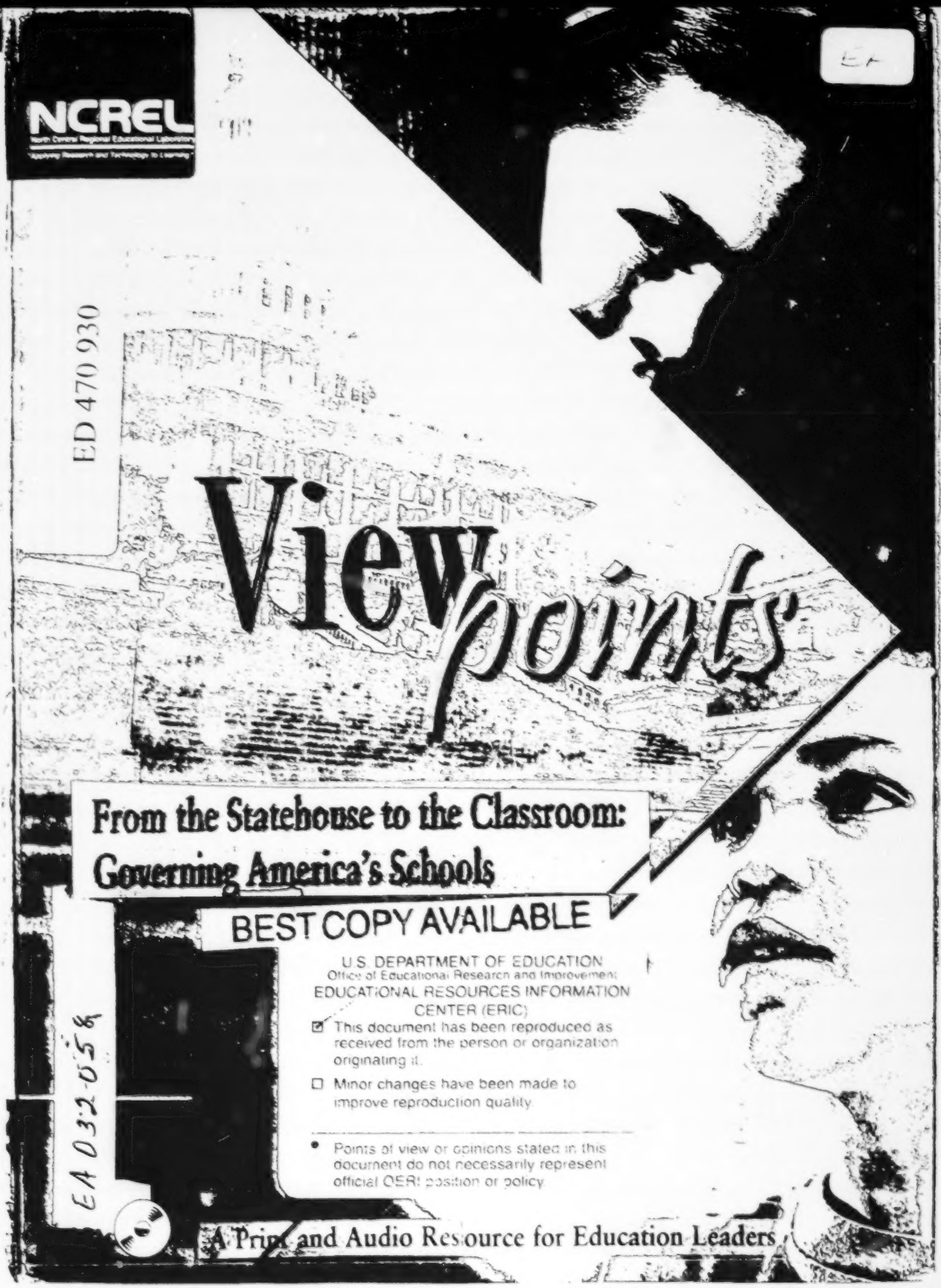
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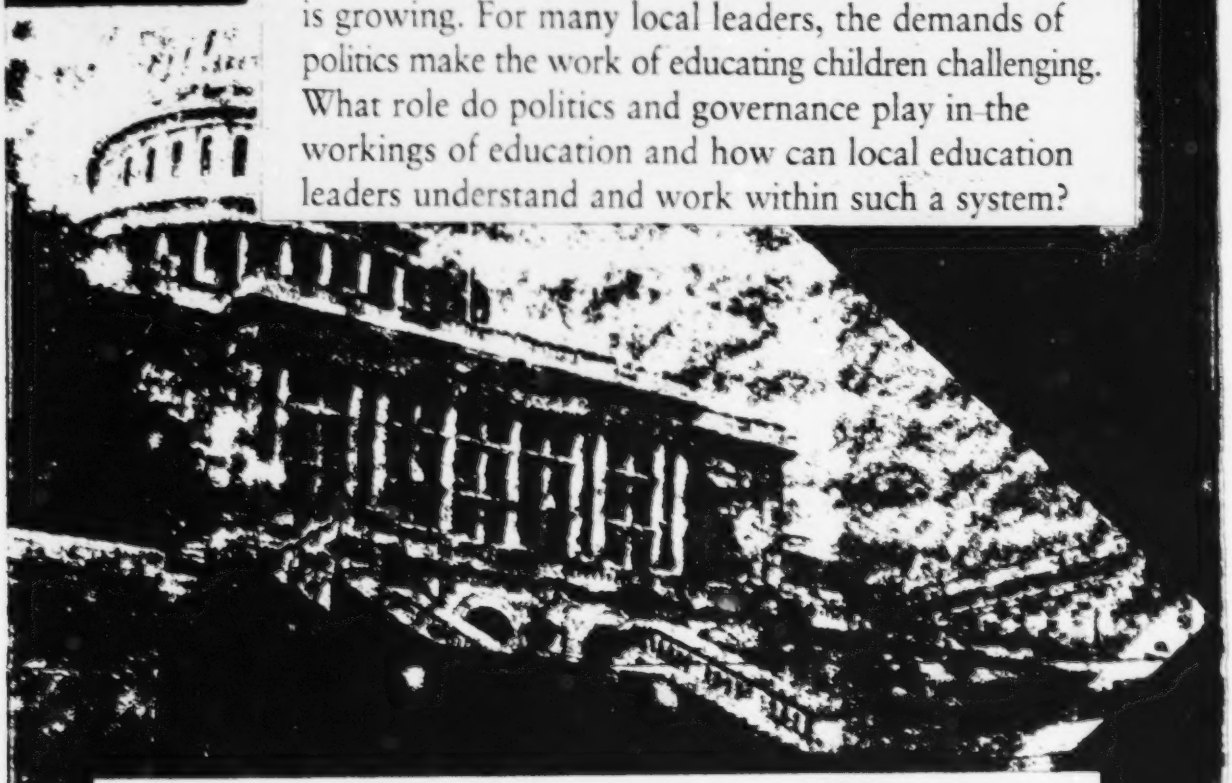
The role of politics in education is undeniable. It appears as though the influence of governing agents—from the White House to the local school board—is growing. For many local leaders, the demands of politics make the work of educating children challenging. What role do politics and governance play in the workings of education and how can local education leaders understand and work within such a system?



CD 1

Track

1. David Tyack, Stanford University, CA
2. Thomas Timar, University of California at Riverside
3. Donald McAdams, Houston Independent School District, TX
4. Fred Hess, Northwestern University, IL
5. Dan Weissman, Chicago Catalyst, IL
6. Martha Wise, Ohio State Board of Education
7. Leah Vukmir, Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools, WI

CD 2

Track

1. Susan Tave Zelman, Ohio State Superintendent of Education
2. Bill Marx, Minnesota House of Representatives
3. Luther Olson, Wisconsin Assembly, Chair of Education Committee
4. Art Rainwater, Superintendent, Madison Public Schools, WI
5. Todd Ziebarth, Education Commission of the States, CO
6. Gene Neely, Kansas Education Association
7. Donald McAdams (cont'd from CD 1)

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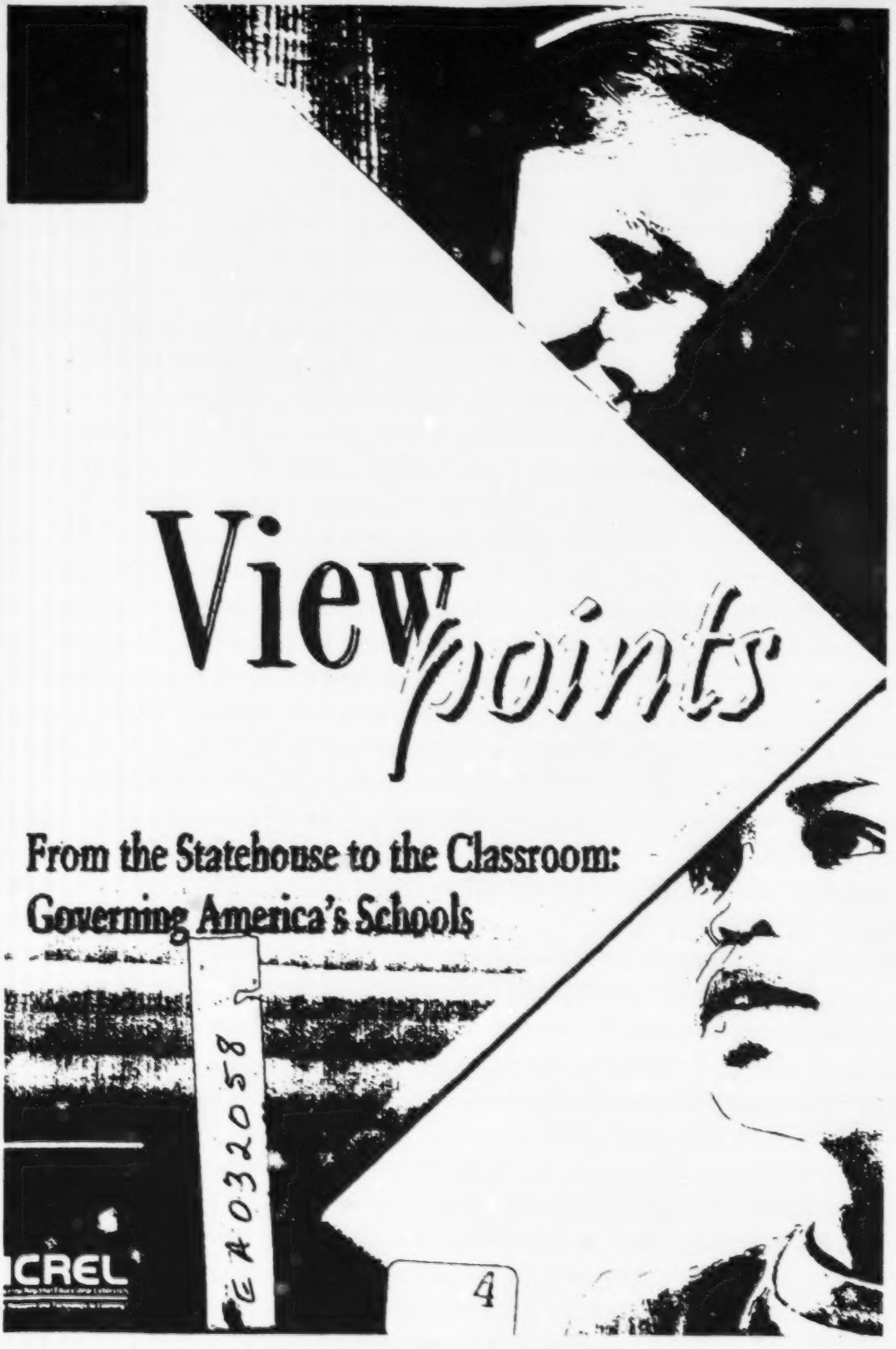

Viewpoints

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From the Statehouse to the Classroom: Governing America's Schools

Viewpoints (formerly the *School Development Outreach Project*) is a multimedia package on education governance designed to provide you with various perspectives, or viewpoints, from national, state, and local voices in education. In this package, you will notice two other changes. In the past, we have focused on emerging hot topics in education policy. In this edition of *Viewpoints*, we are examining a broader issue—the role of governance in education. Also, for the first time we are making *Viewpoints* available in CD format. This new feature allows you to easily revisit interview segments of interest. The accompanying booklet provides a general overview of this complex issue. We believe this multimedia package will serve as a valuable resource for you and your work.

The Issue

The role of politics in education is undeniable. In fact, it appears as though the influence of governing agents, from the White House to the local school board, is growing. During this time of increased calls for

accountability and reform, we see a growing list of educational mandates being handed to local education entities—increased use of testing, teacher-proof curricula, legislation regarding who can and will teach our children. For many education leaders at the local district level, the increased demands and prescriptive measures are perceived as hindrances to their work of educating children. Historically, we have placed a high value on localism. Involvement from various political levels is often met with resistance, as was evidenced during the early 20th century when leaders tried to remove schools from politics. Education historian David Tyack (1990) calls these efforts "a foolish impossibility." Therefore, if politics is a necessary aspect of education—and the role of politics is certainly not diminishing—how can local education leaders better understand and embrace the system in a manner that supports their work of educating children? This booklet and accompanying CDs examine the history, structure, and presence of governance and the politics that arise from governing a system for the common good, as well as thoughts on how local leaders can work within a political system.

The Booklet: A Guide to Contents

The essay "Is Politics in Education Here to Stay?" will provide you with an overview of the issue, a bit of history, and a look at governance structures. You will also find recommended strategies for superintendents—from superintendents—in dealing successfully with the politics of education. You may find it helpful to read the booklet as an introduction to the topic before listening to interviews presented on the CDs.

1. **Introduction** *1*
   Introduces the challenges of politics in education felt by local education leaders

2. **Defining "Politics"** *5*
   Outlines the definitions of "politics" as used in this document

3. **The History of Education Governance and Politics** *6*
   Provides a brief overview of education history over the past 200 years

4. **The Structure of Education Politics** *9*
   Offers an overview of powers that influence education at local, state, and federal levels

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5. What Effect Does Politics Really Have on Education? 14
Examines the effects of politics on schooling

6. Politics as a Lever 17
Provides examples of how politics directly influences student learning

7. Politics: Impediment to Education? 19
Discusses whether politics can influence education

8. Strategic Thinking for Local Leadership 23
Suggests strategies for local superintendents

9. Conclusion 29

9

Viewpoints

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Audio CDs: A Guide to Contents

The CDs provide you with various perspectives on the history, governance, and politics that influence education. Education historians, people active in local and state politics, and long-time observers of education governance share their experiences and insights.

CD 1 – Interviews (in order of appearance)

1. **David Tyack** is a historian of education at Stanford University and author of *The One Best System* and coauthor of *The Invisible Hand of Ideology: Perspectives from the History of School Governance,* written for the National Commission on School Governance.

2. **Thomas Timar** teaches education policy and politics at the University of California at Riverside and is the author of the article "Do State Education Agencies Matter?" and the coauthor of the article "The Invisible Hand of Ideology."

3. **Donald McAdams** is a long-time member and two-time president of the Houston Independent School District and executive vice-president of the American Productivity & Quality Center. He teaches at the University of Houston and was a

member of the National Commission on Governing America's Schools.

4. **Fred Hess** is the director of Urban School Policy at Northwestern University and a long-time observer of and participant in Chicago school reform.
5. **Dan Weissman** writes for *Catalyst*, a journal of Chicago school reform.
6. **Martha Wise** is a long-time member of the Ohio State Board of Education and its past president. She was the cochair of the Governor's Commission for Student Success.
7. **Leah Vukmir** is the president of PRESS (Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools), a Wisconsin parent advocacy group.

CD 2 – Interviews (in order of appearance)

1. **Susan Tave Zelman** is the state superintendent of education in Ohio.
2. **Bill Marx** is the chief fiscal analyst for the Minnesota House of Representatives.
3. **Luther Olson** is a member of the Wisconsin Assembly and chair of the education committee. He is a former school board member.

4. Art Rainwater is the superintendent of the Madison, Wisconsin, school district.
5. Todd Ziebarth is a policy analyst at the Education Commission of the States and has worked with the National Commission on School Governance.
6. Gene Neely is the president of the Kansas Education Association.
7. Donald McAdams (continued from CD 1)

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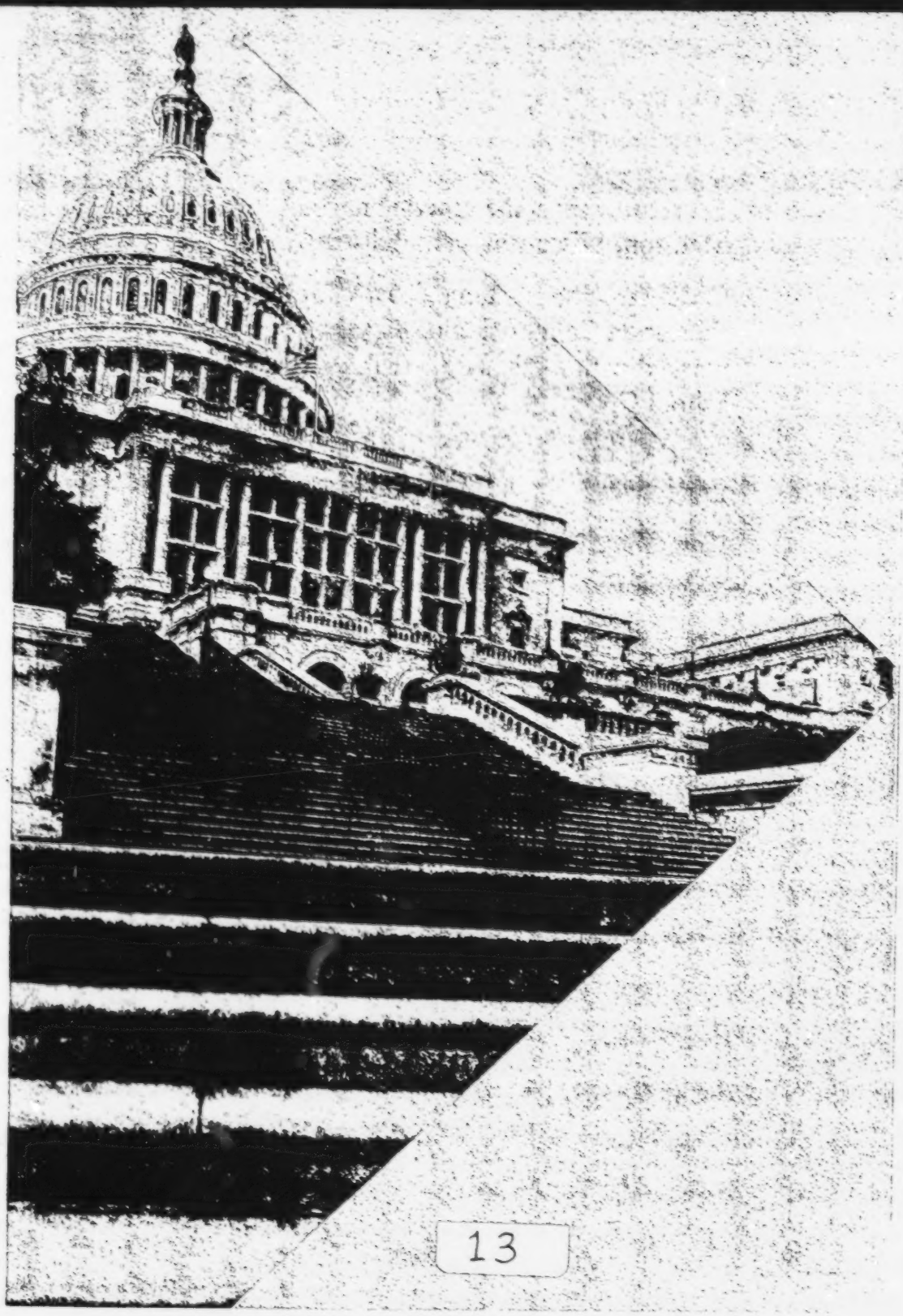

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Is Politics in Education Here to Stay?

by Rhetta L. Detrich with Paul Kimmelman

Introduction

Anthony Alvarado, urban superintendent and long-time education leader, was quoted during his 12-year tenure as superintendent of New York's District 2 as saying the educational enterprise should have a sole focus—student learning. It is hard to argue with the concept. And yet for many in the educational enterprise, that sole focus is muddied. Alvarado states, "A typical educational system is so top-heavy with details that learning can suffocate under the tonnage" (Price, 1999). From Alvarado's perspective, those systemic details are very real obstacles to his work of educating children. What are these "details"? In large part, they are the stuff of governance and bureaucracy—mandates, power struggles, the positioning of interests and agendas. In short, politics.

Education is no more devoid of politics or its implications than any other institution. The "details" that Alvarado sees as suffocating the work of schooling are not unique to local superintendents or education.

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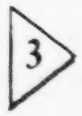
They are the necessary by-products of organizational governance. As with all governance structures, there is general agreement that a system be created to best serve the constituents. Education has a very broad, but commonly agreed upon objective—to provide children with a good education. What is not agreed upon, however, is how to go about such a task. Within education governance, conflicts emerge over how to structure systems that best educate young minds and *who* will be responsible for making those decisions. The range of possibilities for *how* political advocacy might translate into actual policies is infinitely varied (Price, 1999). As conflicts arise over how and who, the positioning for power and voice emerges despite the common altruistic goal of serving students. Resolving these conflicts, as well as "deciding who will decide," is the function of politics that arises from a system of democratic governance (Plank & Boyd, 1994). Even within education, these same conflicts and decisions will emerge.

2

Superintendents often engage in a dance of tending to the "details" perceived as extraneous and superfluous before they are able to move on to the heart of their work as education leaders: supporting student learning.

Mr. Alvarado is certainly not alone in his frustration over the suffocating details. A quick scan of recent education administrator publications reveals that Alvarado, along with countless other superintendents, sees the outputs of political wranglings as hurdles to be jumped before student learning can be placed at the heart of the educational enterprise. Recent topics read more like the chapters from a self-help book: fights for fair funding, struggles with boards of education, conflicts with teachers unions, the apathy of state policymakers, politics that invade and cripple. Superintendents often engage in a dance of tending to the "details" perceived as extraneous and superfluous before they are able to move on to the heart of their work as education leaders: supporting student learning.



Recent political trends indicate that dodging such "details" is becoming more difficult than ever and may prove to be a faulty strategy for local education leaders in the real work of educating students. The distance between Capitol Hill, the Statehouse, and the local district is closing rapidly. The tone and pace for education reform more than ever is being influenced by a wide array and large number of political players at the federal and state levels, most recently manifesting itself in high accountability measures with potentially stiff consequences for districts. Secretary of

Education Roderick Paige outlined the Bush plan before the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce by calling for a dramatic shift in culture from one of "compliance with rules and regulations" to one of direct "accountability for results" in the shape of annual testing and funding measures. The message is clear: Superintendents can no longer avoid addressing the politics of education head-on or continue to perceive the impact of politics as minimal. Placing student learning at the heart of the enterprise is something that must be done within the arena of politics, not despite it.

4

Superintendents can no longer avoid addressing the politics of education head-on or continue to perceive the impact of politics as minimal.

The question we will examine is not whether politics exists within education but what form does politics take as it pertains to education; what effect, if any, does it have on the actual work of student learning; and how can education leaders negotiate the growing presence of politics within local education systems.

Defining "Politics"

David Tyack states that politics and public education are inseparable (interview with Ed Janus for *Viewpoints*, 2001). But what do we mean by "politics"? It conjures up an array of images and ideas, some more appealing than others. *Webster's Dictionary* outlines definitions ranging from "the art and science of government" to "factional scheming for power." The definitions are highly varied. What is consistent in most definitions is the notion of politics as something that necessarily arises from the system of governance. If governance is the system of directing affairs or political administration, politics is a by-product of that system. Our government is the structure, or machine, we construct. The operation of the machine, the attempts to control the direction, speed, and function of the machine is politics. The not-so-favorable interpretations of politics arise from the fact that many differing factions would like to control the machine of governance, and there are an infinite number of interpretations of how it can and should be driven. Add to this, that societal conditions and demands are always changing. What does or does not work today may not have the same effect tomorrow.

5

The not-so-favorable interpretations of politics arise from the fact that many differing factions would like to control the machine of governance, and there are an infinite number of interpretations of how it can and should be driven.

In the most general of interpretations, politics signifies many things—"the art of governance," "the guidance of policy," and "the winning and holding of control over government" (*Webster's Dictionary*). Each aspect of politics is imperative as it pertains to U.S. education. Elmore (1997) describes politics as occurring in an arena of conflict, where competing interest groups with different resources and capacities vie for influence to shape policy in their own image. Education is yet another arena of conflicting priorities and interests where politics manifests itself.

The History of Education Governance and Politics

With all of the effort and attention directed towards education from every level of government, it is difficult to believe there is no mention of education or its governance within the federal constitution. For most of the 19th century, education lacked a pervasive governing structure at either the national or local levels. It would be inaccurate to describe the U.S. as having

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an actual public education "system." Rather, "schooling was a local affair" (Chubb, 1990). Authority was highly decentralized and schooling was overseen by those who knew the local schools best. The Industrial Revolution of the late 1800s marked a shift within the private sector toward corporate operational models and a reliance on "experts" to increase organizational efficiency. The role of expertise permeated not just large-scale industry but found its way into education governance as well (Timar & Tyack, 1999). The local superintendent filled the role of education expert, a figure intended to lend professionalism and neutrality to large, often unwieldy school boards. The watchwords of reform during the first half of the 20th century became centralization, expertise, professionalism, and efficiency (Kirst, 2000).

From the late 1950s through the early 1970s, the education system faced new challenges from people who had been systematically disenfranchised based on race, class, gender, and ability. The system of expertise and professionalism was inflexible in design and thus unable to meet the needs of certain segments of the population. As state legislatures and the courts exerted pressure on behalf of new grass-roots political actors, the system became fragmented and thus more responsive to these unique needs (Tyack, 1990).

With the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education warned of an education crisis tantamount to a national defense crisis. The images of a rising tide of educational mediocrity are debatable. What is clear, however, is the power and the impact education would have on politics throughout the rest of the century. Education became the hottest and most hotly contested political football in the political arena. The benefits of riding the education reform wave as a politician could not be overlooked. Unlike many federally issued reports, *A Nation At Risk* received widespread public attention. The public made demands on politicians to "Do something."

They asked questions: "How bad is it?" "How did it get this bad?" "Who let this happen?" "Who is going to be responsible for it?" These questions quickly found their way into state-level politics. Education became a central focus for the National Governors Association during the 1980s and '90s. States exerted greater pressure upon and created systems of accountability for local districts. Business leaders, parents, and educational experts became key voices in the dialogue of reform. The solutions proposed at all levels

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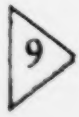
were highly outcomes based: demand more by setting a new standard for schools, teachers, and students. After all, failure to expect enough in terms of test scores, passing rates, and graduation rates resulted in a national crisis.

A Nation at Risk legitimized the beginnings of education reform and set the stage for the education reformer bandwagon (Elmore, 1997). Political campaigns were won and lost, in part, on the public's faith in political candidates to become our education saviors. The 1980s witnessed the powerful emergence of education politicians. Mayors and governors campaigned on their abilities to turn education around, while a dramatic increase in state legislation introduced high standards for teachers and students (Tyack, 1990). The 1990s incorporated the notion of autonomy and accountability further, with growing support for a free-market system of governance in the shape of charters, vouchers, and school choice with a growing emphasis on standardized testing.



The Structure of Education Politics

As with most issues of governance in the United States, a high value traditionally has been placed on localism with regard to the governance of education.

For much of the past 200 years, the political fluctuations and shifts in power and ideology were centered away from the federal level. The U.S. Department of Education and federal legislation established only the broadest of mandates for the provision of education. There has long been a reluctance to develop strict national curriculum standards or a national assessment. The result has been that the amount of direct impact the federal level could have on the day-to-day educating of students was limited. During the last century, court decisions and legislative mandates made specific provisions for certain segments of the population who were generally underserved (e.g., disabled children, English-language learners). Increased federal dollars followed to supplement the additional costs associated with meeting the needs of these segments of the population.

Without a federal education mandate, state agencies established the bulk of the standards and practices for their schools. Most state constitutions included language providing for free public education for students. In addition, states legislated broad curriculum standards and developed their own testing practices. Local districts generally complied with the educational mandates established at the federal and local levels. The daily lives of districts were most affected, not by these

Viewpoints

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mandates, but by the interaction between the district office, the local superintendent, and the school board. Here is where most of the governance, policy shaping, and controlling of the local system occurred.

The continued growth of the education reform movement has reshaped the political structure of education. More interests and activists are at the political table from every level of governance: from the White House to the local parent organization. And each one is demanding more of education with louder voices and a stronger interest than ever before. More bodies are leveraging their political skill and power to exert pressure on the education system in the name of reform. For the local district, the increasing political pressure from a widening arena has meant a large shift for the role of local education leaders. Accountability for reforming education falls squarely on the district. Paul Houston, long-time superintendent and executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, believes the shifting of responsibility in conjunction with heightened accountability pressures creates an unrealistic challenge for today's superintendents (Houston, 2001). "While we tend to centralize responsibility in education reform, authority is widely dispersed," says Houston. He believes that superintendents are asked what they are going to do

to reform education, yet the real authority and power are dispersed throughout an education system that includes boards, unions, governors, mayors, legislators, and judges. The solution, according to Houston, is either to recentralize the authority and capacity to engage in the work of reform that is being mandated or to redistribute the responsibility beyond the superintendent.

The politics of education is the result of the unique and complex interrelationship of political actors, all advocating their own visions of education. The public education system is in constant flux, due in part to the constant struggles for and resulting shifts in power. But a system that is in constant flux is really the nature of the political beast. There are constant subtle and not-so-subtle shifts in the political environment that throw today's political causes aside in search of new and better answers as our appetites, interests, and intellects change over time.

Joel Spring (1988) divides key political actors into three categories—major government actors (politicians, school boards, and the courts), special interest groups (unions, foundations, parents, and business), and the knowledge industry (funding agencies, researchers, knowledge brokers, and testing and publishing industries), each with its own set of interests.

While this list is not comprehensive, it does provide a framework for understanding these actors as well as the conflicting relationship of dependency and competition that emerge.

This relationship is frequently criticized as a barrier to creating real change within the system. However, several key reforms within education, particularly at the federal level, have been the result of interest groups applying pressure and forming political alliances to create changes in areas such as special education, school integration, and social services for children.

13

The knowledge industry, in addition to developing what will be taught and how it will be taught in schools, provides government actors and interest groups with heightened legitimacy for their platforms through research and expertise. The results of solid research and development serve as valuable tools in shaping sound policy. Therefore, continued research and development in education directly affect the momentum of the other political arenas.

The importance of being in tune to the wants and agenda items of interest groups involved in education, as well as a basic familiarity with the research base

around critical and emerging education issues, is more important now than ever for those seeking political positions. As part of a Campaign 2000 series, *Education Week* (Keller, 2000) pointed out the growing number of political candidates with education at the top of their priority lists. Michael Griffith of the Education Commission of the States speculates that a sound economy, reduced crime, and no major overseas conflicts allow the voters to focus on education more than ever (Keller, 2000). Those seeking to gain and hold onto political office are clearly in tune with that. "All of the polls say you have to say education is important," observed Todd Donovan, a professor of political science at Western Washington University in Bellingham (Keller, 2000).

What Effect Does Politics Really Have on Education?

The underlying assumption behind the political structure of education is that there is a direct link to the education of students. In theory, the established system of educational governance elicits or supports political action that can improve educational quality and accessibility for students. Politics moves levers on the machine to produce the best results. Of course, theory does not always translate clearly into practice.

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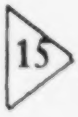
Determining how the politics of education actually translates into learning is a difficult task. The connection between politics and educational outcomes is tenuous at best (Ziebarth, 1999). Governance is an art as opposed to a science in large part because its direct effects, positive or negative, are difficult to quantify. Were politics a science, it would be possible to trace a causal relationship between political action and societal gain (or loss). However we are never certain if the political inputs of any given action result in a child learning to read. The task of determining what political inputs, if any, have an effect is highly complicated by the fact that no action occurs in isolation. Rather, there are many mandates, policies, and exertions of political will enacted simultaneously in constantly changing environments. This constant uncertainty may be the fuel of politics: Not knowing which actions produce results makes the idea of new and possibly more effective options attractive.



Determining how the politics of education actually translates into learning is a difficult task. The connection between politics and educational outcomes is tenuous at best.

Some would argue that politics has created necessary structures for governance and a system within which advocates, champions, and experts continue to "tinker" toward that one best system to meet the needs of students (Tyack, 1990). Others say that maybe the politics of education has become so large and unruly that we are left with a bureaucratic beast, far removed from the actual work of educating children: a system concerned with its own survival rather than influencing student learning.

What is certain is that the influence of politics on the delivery of education is greater than ever. The far-reaching arms of federal and state policy mandates are changing the way districts respond. The delivery of local services is shaped by the threat of federal and state accountability measures. The challenge at the local level is to be responsive to the increasing political inputs for which superintendents will be held accountable. What effect those decisions will have on the quality of teaching and learning remains to be seen. What is evident is that states and districts will be asked to respond soon, as conversations of increased accountability are currently occurring at the federal and state levels.

Politics as a Lever

Proving a direct causal relationship between politics and student outcomes is nearly impossible. However, recent investigation has revealed a distinct correlation between political inputs and educational gains. David Grissmer of Rand investigated the possible factors contributing to significant gains on the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) made in Texas and North Carolina (Grissmer, 2000). Both states shared similar educational policies thought to be linked to the gains; however, similar policies existed in other states that did not exhibit these same significant gains. Grissmer contends the successes enjoyed in Texas and North Carolina are as closely linked to *how* policies were implemented as to the content of the policies themselves. One of the primary influencing factors in each state was strong political leadership. Grissmer indicates that without the political leadership present in each state, it would be "difficult if not impossible to create the continuity in the reform agenda that is critical to long-term success." In the cases of Texas and North Carolina, the *guidance of policy* and *governance of education,* as well as the *consistency of political control,* were all found to contribute to measurable indicators of student success.

This same level of political continuity and governance discussed by Grissmer at the state level could be central to the success of former Houston superintendent and current U.S. Secretary of Education Roderick Paige. While Washington, D.C., Denver, New York City, and Los Angeles all grappled with the challenges of turnover, Paige was entering his sixth year as (and becoming the country's highest paid) superintendent. He was being heralded as a leader responsible for achieving results. According to Palmaffy (2000), "Paige's longevity has given Houston schools something other urban districts crave: continuity." Superintendent Paige's ability to govern, ability to maintain political control, and capacity to shape policy are pointed out as being critical aspects of his success in raising scores, slowing attrition, and increasing graduation rates in Houston. Paige also echoed the national and state policy calls for education improvement: test scores, standards, and accountability.

Despite examples of political action coinciding with education success, making the case for politics as a powerful lever for affecting the quality and delivery of education to students is becoming more challenging. During the past two decades, communities across the United States have felt a growing frustration over the state of education and its governance. There is a grow-

ing contention that the rhetoric around education reform is just that. Richard Elmore (1997) states that there is a significant gap between "policy talk" and actions that result in the actual schooling of students. Proposals to build stronger connections between politics and schooling appear to be gaining less momentum with the public and political supporters than those proposals that advocate a full departure from traditional democratic politics into "anti-politics."

A perceived inability to generate coherent approaches and sustained direction in education governance lead some to believe that the traditional governing structure of education, and thus the politics arising from the system, should be abandoned altogether.

19

Politics: Impediment to Education?

For some, the failure of educational governance is a given. The question at hand is one of what can and should be done to rebuild and thereby rectify the state of traditional education politics. Plank and Boyd (1994) describe a shift during the 1990s towards "anti-politics" by which discussions of educational reform centered on the institutions of governance rather than specific reform strategies. A perceived

inability to generate coherent approaches and sustained direction in education governance lead some to believe that the traditional governing structure of education, and thus the politics arising from the system, should be abandoned altogether.

There is a growing interest in the role of markets and the courts over the traditional institutional powers of legislatures and school boards as a means of genuinely affecting the work of schools (Fuhrman, 1994). One of the most influential education critiques of the 1990s, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* by John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990), contends that despite a wave of reform efforts at the state and local levels, at the root of the problem are the "institutions of direct democratic control" that are incompatible with effective schooling. The predominant political institutions of education governance promote and protect a heavily bureaucratic system. Bureaucratic systems, by design, are able to maintain a status quo even during times of chaos that demand response and change.

According to Ziebarth (1999), "The stability of the traditional bureaucratic system is viewed as a liability by those who support the notion that organizational flexibility, adaptability and creativity are necessary if education is going to properly prepare the next generation for the fast-paced, ever-changing and technologi-

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cally oriented world that awaits them." The notion of education systems that are flexible and creative to meet the demands of more students seems innocuous enough. How these same ideals manifest themselves into new organizational policies and structures has caused alarm for some and drives a wedge into the center of the education reform community. Some of these approaches operating outside traditional bureaucratic politics include regulatory flexibility and autonomy, school-based management, open-enrollment policies, charter schools, tax credits, and vouchers.

21

The potential of these options for affecting schooling was recently considered by the National Commission on Governing America's Schools (convened in 1999 by the Education Commission of the States). This group of educators, academics, politicians, and policymakers set out to investigate effective and responsive governance structures and policies. In their report, *Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules* (2000), the Commission advocated for two approaches to improving governance for consideration by states.

One approach would create a system of publicly authorized and operated schools based on promising

practices of the prevailing system, and the second would create publicly authorized but *independently* operated schools, limited only by state and federal laws, much like the charter school system (Education Commission of the States, 1999). Each approach was intended to create greater capacity for autonomy, adaptability, flexibility, creativity, and accountability by shifting the center of control away from traditional systems of governance and bureaucratic decision making and toward school-level management.

22 The current trend does seem to be the devolution of authority to those closer to the students.

The current trend does seem to be the devolution of authority to those closer to the students. In response, many states have allowed and even encouraged the "anti-politics" described by Plank and Boyd in exchange for mayors, states, and the federal government wielding bigger accountability arsenals in the shape of reconstitution, takeovers, licensure/accreditation, and funding. Whether this approach to managing education through high-stakes accountability will yield student results is unclear.

According to some, these "tough-love" governance tactics are not the answer for a variety of reasons. These measures lack meaningful structure and are pedagogically off target. Low-income urban and rural students are the ones who will suffer at the hands of punitive measures (Price, 1999). For them, the problem is twofold: First, the politics of education is removed from the real work of schooling and contributes little to actual learning. Second, this option exacerbates the less-than-perfect conditions under which they are already educated.

Strategic Thinking for Local Leadership

The call to save education has been made. It is unclear exactly what we bargained for when we made the call. From *A Nation at Risk* to the advent of standards-based reform to a growing focus on accountability, it seems as though more people answered the call than was expected: the President, Congress, the statehouse, mayors, school boards, teachers' unions, parent groups. It is natural that districts may feel overwhelmed or intruded upon in their work. For many local leaders, the influence of politics has been perceived as separate from the work of educating children at the schoolhouse or even district levels.

Judith Ferguson, a former superintendent in New Jersey, painted a telling picture of a ringmaster at the circus as a metaphor for the job (Ferguson, 2001). One ring in particular requires the constant, watchful eye of the superintendent. In this ring we find board members, parents, politicians, business leaders, and other interest groups. Superintendents often view this ring as remote from the purpose of schooling, or the main show. The unmistakable truth is that the action in the ring that houses politics must be acknowledged and integrated into the superintendent's management of the bigger show.

24

Education has moved into the public forum and schools must respond appropriately. Elmore (1997) contends that if education leaders persist in trying to insulate schools and instruction from the external pressures of standards and scrutiny, the drive of market forces in education will drive out the public nature of public education. Educators will simply "watch the public purpose of public education drift away into matters of individual taste and preference."

Along with the realization that we cannot insulate schools from these external pressures, comes the understanding that we must develop and learn strate-

gies that incorporate effective learning and teaching practices within a system of heightened state and federal accountability. For many local superintendents, the mindset is changing and a new role as political liaison is emerging. District superintendents are now engaging in some simple and creative ways that could be considered options for your work in your district.

For many local superintendents, the mindset is changing and a new role as political liaison is emerging.

You could:

- Embrace the task of guiding the district through a process of negotiating the policies of standards reform and accountability. External scrutiny and external solutions require that superintendents respond to them rather than engage in the work of schooling as a cloistered act (Negroni, 2000).
- Make your voice, as a local education leader, heard at all levels of politics. Join with the voices of others in the community—business, civic, and higher education organizations—to communicate the successes of your work and acknowledge the work that still needs to be done (Hoyle, 1999).

- Monitor emerging education issues in Washington and your state capitol. While it may take more valuable time from an already-busy schedule, this strategy can help you influence decisions that might otherwise have an adverse impact on your local school district. With education a high priority on most politicians' platforms, the importance of taking time to let them know your positions on issues increases.

- Establish relationships with those who manage the educational systems for which you are being held accountable. The flow of communication has a tendency to roll downhill. More and more communication about the work of schools is coming from federal and state levels. Respond. Make it a point to turn the flow around. You, as a district education leader, lend an expertise to educational decision making. Direct access to U.S. senators is difficult, but establishing a relationship with their education staff representatives is possible. These staff members are knowledgeable about the issues and should hear your opinions when proposed legislation affects your district.

- Think creatively about ways of communicating that roll uphill. Once a year, your U.S. representative should be invited to a focused education

meeting in his or her congressional district. Make your efforts collaborative and, thus, more powerful. Work with other school districts, parent groups, business leaders, and other local government officials to present a unified voice and presence. The greater the representation of constituents, the more likely you are to get a favorable response to your positions on the issues.

- Leverage relationships and the information you gain in communicating with policymakers to make you a more effective political navigator on local fronts. Information about expectations, trends, and the general political tide become valuable tools for all local educators in understanding and then meeting expectations emerging from political forces.

- Consider writing an education newsletter addressing what is happening in the federal and state legislatures on education. This publication can be an informative tool used to advise local school constituents on education issues that affect their school community, rather than a political soapbox. It can advocate on a particular issue,

suggesting constituents contact their representative and encourage him or her to vote a particular way.

- Provide a concise political issues briefing book for school board members. Define the issue and outline how the legislation affects your school district.
- Discuss legislative issues at administrator meetings as a regular agenda item. While there might not always be a "burning issue" each month, placing political policymaking issues on each agenda gives the topic the constant attention it requires.

These suggestions, shared by other superintendents recognizing the same challenges, are intended to help you navigate the slightly more crowded waters of educating young people.

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Conclusion

The work of local schooling is no longer the work of the local educator. This fact in no way lessens the burden or scope of work of the superintendent. On the contrary, the role is now one for a leader who can look beyond the district lines, bridge gaps in perspective, and communicate and translate effectively in order to meet the new demands placed on education at the local level from places to which we gave little thought in the past. Houston (2001) spells out the challenge: "As education stands in the national spotlight, there are few roles as complex or as pivotal as that of the public school superintendent. And as we move into the future, it is inevitable that the job will continue to be one of controversy, concern, and consequence." He believes that the superintendent of the 21st century can focus his or her attention on the issues being shaped at a more macro level. "We can like or dislike these challenges," Houston explains. "It doesn't matter. They are with us, and that is really all that counts. How school leaders choose to face them will make the difference in how the future looks. And choosing to face this new future from a position of strength will require a new breed of leader."

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Resources on Politics and Governance on the Internet

The following Internet resources all provide information on governance and politics. These sites address different audiences and perspectives and are constantly changing, allowing you to stay abreast of local, state, and federal issues as they pertain to educational governance and politics.

American Association of School Administrators
www.aasa.org
Scan of national headlines; page on government relations; page on school/district governance; variety of publications including *The School Administrator, Leadership News*, and *School Government Leadership* (past issues are searchable)

American Federation of Teachers-Legislative Action Center
www.aft.org/legislation
Tracks Congressional votes on education issues; Contact Congress page provides fax and e-mail contact information, and representatives' and senators' voting records, and lets you search for congressional representative by zip code and view congressional schedules

The American Prospect Online
www.prospect.org
Articles, forums, and special issues pages including one dedicated to children and families

The Brookings Institute
www.brook.edu
Independent organization; critiques and analyses of policy issues including education

Brown Center on Education Policy
http://www.brook.edu/gs/brown/brown_hp.htm
Research publications from the Center on education, particularly education reform issues

Center on Education Policy
www.ctredpol.org
Articles on public education including reviews of local, state, and national education policy issues

Committee on Education and the Workforce
http://edworkforce.house.gov
Committee scheduling, markups, live Webcast of hearings, committee members, publications, and links to resources

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Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

www.senate.gov/~labor

Members, subcommittees, hearings, live Webcasts, legislation, and federal links

The Council of Chief State School Officers

www.ccsso.org

Web site of the organization composed of the officials who lead the departments overseeing public education within the states; includes statements of policy, federal legislative positions and programs, as well as CCSSO publications; includes links to each state agency

35

Democracy In Action – Key Links

http://gwu.edu/~action/Key.html

Links to the Web sites of all aspects of policy including major political parties, advocacy groups, consultants, think tanks, foundations, media, community, and academic groups

Democratic National Committee

www.democrats.org/index.html

News overviews, issues statements, and links to state party officials

Education Commission of the States
www.ecs.org
Numerous research and policy publications and an overview of current policy issues across the nation

Education Week on the Web
www.edweek.org
Hot topics, special reports, and weekly articles on education; daily news scan of national headlines for education articles

FirstGov

www.firstgov.gov
Official government Web site; allows searches by government organization (federal, state, and local) or by topic, including education

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
www.edexcellence.net
Research and publications on elementary and secondary education reform policy

The Heritage Foundation
www.heritage.org
Conservative education think tank; publications and reviews of education policy topics

HillSource-House Republican Conference
http://hillsource.house.gov
Daily briefings, legislative digest, issues scanning, house calendar, and hot topics

National Conference of State Legislatures
www.ncsl.org
Provides news, policy issues scanning, information about and directory of state legislatures, and policy positions statements

National Education Association Legislative Action Center
www.nea.org/lac
Overview of current education topics, e-mail links for Congress and state legislators, weekly review of federal legislation impacting schools, monthly review of Congressional issues, and U.S. representatives' and senators' voting records

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory Policy Page
www.ncrel.org/policy
Education policy research and publications as well as information regarding NCREL's policy work within the region

National Governors Association Online
www.nga.org
NGA policy positions, legislative issues, state policy issues, reports from NGA, and current hot topics

National School Boards Association,
Office of Advocacy
www.nsba.org/advocacy
Current status of legislation, Congress members' voting records on key education legislation, capability to e-mail representatives, overviews of recent federal legislation

Political Information.com
www.politicalinformation.com
A search engine for politics, policy, and political news

Republican National Committee
www.rnc.org
Daily features, issues statements, and links to state party officials

Thomas – Legislative Information on the Internet
http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.html
Service of the Library of Congress; provides information on House and Senate scheduling; legislative process overviews; bill texts, summaries, votes, and status; committee information; and Library of Congress Web links

U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov
President's and Secretary's priorities, research and statistics, publications, programs and services, news and events, and links to other sites

State Governing Agencies Web sites

State	Education Agency	Governor's Office	State Legislature
Illinois	www.isbe.state.il.us	www.state.il.us	www.state.il.us/state/legis
Indiana	www.doe.state.in.us	www.in.gov/gov	www.in.gov/legislative
Iowa	www.state.ia.us/educate	www.state.ia.us/governor	www.legis.state.ia.us
Michigan	www.mde.state.mi.us	www.migov.state.mi.us	http://michigan legislature.org/
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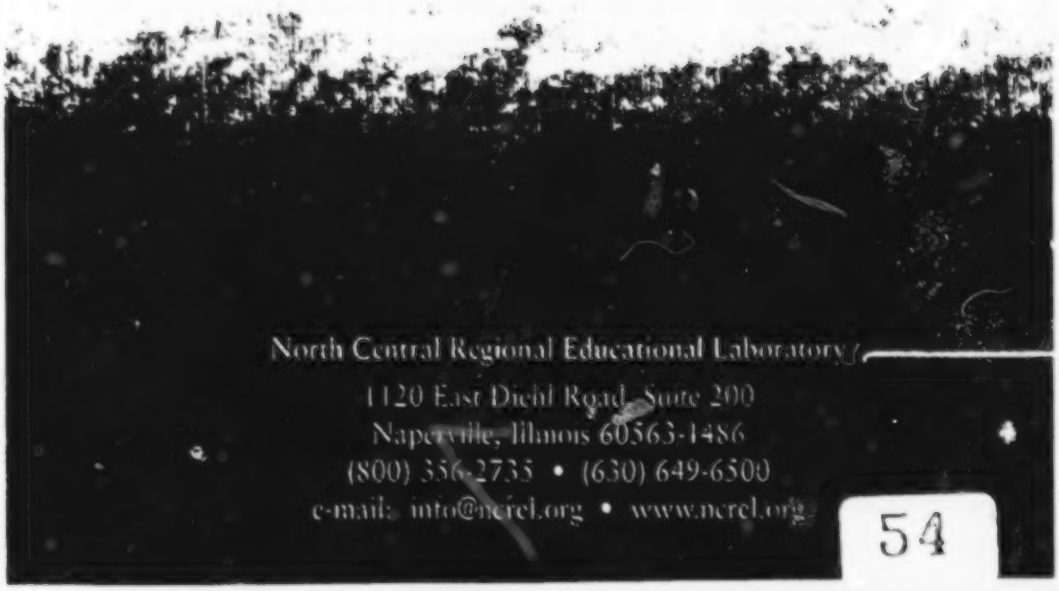

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A *Free* Resource From NCREL

Dear Colleague:

A 1999 report by the Education Commission of the States declares, "Given the higher demands on public schools and the different conditions among districts, one way to increase the number of successful schools may be to alter public education governance—that is, change who makes what education decisions within states, districts and schools." In response to this report, NCREL invited education policy researchers and representatives from foundations and education associations to discuss the implications of changing governance structures in the Midwest. The enclosed materials, entitled "From the Statehouse to the Classroom: Governing America's Schools," were borne out of that discussion.

Unlike past editions of our audio series, which have focused on emerging hot topics in education, this edition examines school governance, an enduring issue in

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American education that continues to be reshaped by changing politics and new efforts in school reform. The audio program offers multiple perspectives on the history, governance, and politics that influence education, and the accompanying booklet includes strategies for superintendents to deal successfully with the politics of education.

Formerly known as the *School Development Outreach Project*, this audio series has seen some reforms of its own: It has a new title—*Viewpoints*—and a new CD format. The new title reflects our desire to provide you with various perspectives, or viewpoints, from national, state, and local voices in education. The CD format allows you to locate and replay interview segments with ease.

We hope you find this package both interesting and informative. For more information on other NCREL resources, please visit our Web site at www.ncrel.org or contact us at (800) 356-2735 or info@ncrel.org.

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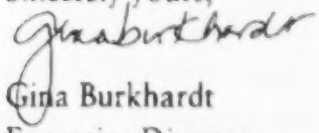

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